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**How employee empowerment concept works at Laulasmaa conference
and spa hotel**

Master's Thesis

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Recommendation for permission to defend thesis

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This Master thesis has been compiled independently. All works by other authors used while compiling the thesis as well as principles and data from literary and other sources have been referred to.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1. DEFINITION OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT	5
1.1 Team empowerment.....	8
1.2 Structural empowerment	10
1.3 Psychological empowerment.....	13
1.4 The risks of employee empowerment	15
2. METHODOLOGY.....	19
3. RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	20
3.1 Case study and questionnaire results	20
3.2 Applying the employee empowerment strategy	28
4. FINDINGS CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	33
CONCLUSION.....	36
REFERENCES	41
APPENDICES.....	46
Appendix 1. Questionnaire	46
Appendix 2. Pictures of Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel	48
SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN / ANNOTATSIOON	49

INTRODUCTION

Different surveys among hospitality industry in Estonia have shown that the hotel front office is one of the least paid professions in Estonia. Although the work is very intensive, mentally and physically quite demanding and stressful on a daily basis, it seems that the work done is not appreciated enough. It is no wonder that the front office receptionists lose their motivation to take initiative and think creative solutions to critical problems. Most of the western world is using the employee empowerment concept to keep their employees motivated and take initiative in everyday matters.

The topic of the thesis is „How employee empowerment concept works at Laulasmaa conference and spa hotel“. Since this particular hotel has not had a front office manager before, the hotel reception is lacking discipline, motivation and a formal set of rules. Employee empowerment concept could be used as a solution to the current problems occurring at this particular working environment. The problem is that employee empowerment concept is still quite new in Estonia and still needs further research. The term is still so new that it does not have an official definition in Estonian. Since this concept is so widely used in the rest of the world, could it be applied to Estonian human resource management as well?

Whether the employee empowerment strategy has an effect on the front office employees at Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel and does it motivate the employees more than monetary values are the questions serving as the hypothesis of the paper. By the end of the thesis it should be clear if employee empowerment concept is beneficial in Estonian hotel management as well and this serving as the aim of this paper. The research should give an answer to the question whether there are alternative methods to motivate hotel employees other than financial matters.

The current thesis includes four main chapters whereas the first chapter will give an overview of employee empowerment in general, defines the meaning of employee empowerment and introduces the different approaches within the subject. The second chapter introduces the methodology used in this paper explaining the quantitative research results and case study approach. The third chapter gives an overview of the findings in methodology section and analyses the results the author found while conducting a quantitative research as well as a profound case study within Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel. The final chapter sums up the findings results and gives recommendations for further action to be conducted at this particular organisation in order to make everyday work even more efficient.

This thesis will consist of profound research on employee empowerment concept and the analysis of Laulasmaa spa hotel's current situation with front desk receptionists. It will also give a wide analysis of a case study when the concept is put to the test in real life situations and as a verdict, this thesis will answer the question whether this approach is beneficial to apply in Estonia's hotels or not. As an additional method, the quantitative research was conducted and the written questionnaire serves as the research instrument. The questionnaire was held among the front office employees and gave the overview of the current situation at this organisation.

All in all, this Master's thesis includes theoretical and empirical study. This paper has an introduction, main body, conclusion, 58 references, an appendix and a summary (Annotatsioon). The empirical study results are shown in 3 figures created and adapted by the author.

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1. DEFINITION OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

It is well known that every employer wants their employees to be highly motivated, enthusiastic and positive at what they do on a daily basis. The downside is that often the employees feel underestimated and used since the salaries do not match the real work done on a day to day basis. It is clear that increasing the salaries is the best motivation but one can only go so far. That raised the question of what can be done to further motivate the employees without arguing over the payment. One of the other important word in motivation is power. When employees feel that they are underestimated, it usually means that they are either underpaid or not given enough power to make their own decisions. This is where employee empowerment came to be. Scholars use the word empowerment in other contexts as well such as in other contexts as well such as empowered feelings. This word seemed suitable for using as a term when talking about employee participation. „Historically, empowered „feelings“ have related to specific contexts in which employees are given authority to make decisions, typically on issues that directly affect their performance“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003). The definition brings out the main aspects of employee empowerment – authority, decision-making, affecting performances. This in turn affects trust between the employer and employees, reducing control over employees and enhancing relations between employees.

Two more scholars have worded another definition for employee empowerment. Sergio Fernandez and Tima Moldogaziev state the following: “Two distinct theoretical perspectives have emerged in the literature, a managerial and a psychological one (employee empowerment). From a managerial perspective, employee empowerment is a relational construct that describes how those with power in organizations share power and formal authority with those lacking it (Conger & Kanungo, 1988)”. Up until the 1990s, there was an understanding between scholars, who adopted managerial empowerment, that empowerment is the knowledge of delegating and sharing decision-

making authority with frontline employees through various participative management techniques (Kanter, 1983) (Pettigrew, 1972) (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). Since this definition proved to be vague and did not comprehend all the aspects involved in this practise, the scholars needed to find a new and improved definition. It was agreed that employee empowerment is “a multifaceted approach to management involving more than simply sharing authority with subordinates and the reconceptualization of empowerment as a psychological construct” (156).

Bowen and Lawler (1992, 1995) noted that “many empowerment programs fail when they focus on “power” without also redistributing information, knowledge and rewards” (Bowen & Lawler, 1992) These two scholars have defined empowerment as an “approach to service delivery” entailing various management practices aimed at sharing four organizational “ingredients” with frontline employees: information about the organization’s performance, rewards based on the organization’s performance, knowledge that enables employees to understand and contribute to organizational performance, and power to make decisions that influence organizational direction and performance (1992, 32).

Sharing information about the organization’s performance is essential to employees. Communicating goals and priorities to employees and offering feedback on performance are practices that have been found to encourage innovation. Top-down communication that conveys the leadership’s priorities and goals can, therefore, encourage achievement-oriented employees to seek new strategies and tactics for attaining those goals. The practice of providing employees with information about goals and performance will be positively related with encouragement to innovate (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2012).

The second point that was brought out by Bowen and Lawler is the reward factor. A large body of research shows that pay and other extrinsic rewards can still be used effectively to increase effort, performance and job satisfaction (Greene & Haywood, 2008) (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992) (Mottaz, 1985) (O’Reilly & Caldwell, 1980). Even among public employees with higher levels of public service motivation, monetary rewards appear to be significantly valued. Evidence suggests pay-for-performance in the public sector is often only marginally effective when it comes to

improving performance (Kellough & Lu, 1993) (Perry, Engbers, & Jun, 2009). The practice of offering employees rewards based on performance will be related with encouragement to innovate, but the direction of the relationship could be either positive or negative.

Thirdly, Bowen and Lawler bring out the essence of training and knowledge. Efforts to enhance employees' access to job-related knowledge and skills through training and job-embedded learning have been linked have been linked to receptivity to new ideas and creativity. Because training and development improves and employee's ability to diagnose and solve technical problems, the odds are increased that innovative proposals will become effective practices (Dewar & Dutton, 1986) (McGinnis & Ackelsberg, 1983) (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2012, p. 160).

The final point which Bowen and Lawler bring out is the question of control. They claim that by loosening controls, managers give entrepreneurial employees freedom to tinker with existing elements and practices and reconfigure them in new ways (Kanter, 1983) (Levin & Sanger, 1994). The practice of granting employees discretion to change work processes will be positively related with encouragement to innovate.

However, even this definition was not enough for some scholars who argued that empowerment is more of a psychological aspect. From this newer perspective, empowerment is an internal cognitive state characterized by enhanced feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) or increased intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Based on these definitions, they claimed that the employee has the need to fulfil two expectations: the expectancy that one's effort will result in the desired level of performance and the expectancy that performance will produce a desired outcome or reward. It is the need of self-accomplishment that motivates employees to aim higher and reach for higher goals. Also, the need to be acknowledged and aim for the reward is what drives employees to perform better. All in all, based on the definitions brought out by the scholars mentioned above, it can be said that empowerment might best be understood as a process involving a set of management practices (sharing authority, resources, information, and rewards) that influence performance (effort, productivity) not only directly but also indirectly through their

impact on employee cognition (self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction) (Bowen & Lawler, 1992) (Spreitzer G. M., 1995) (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

1.1 Team empowerment

Another scholar, Spreitzer, has defined empowerment as an increased task motivation resulting from an individual's positive orientation to his or her work role. What is interesting is the situation that most of the studies done on employee empowerment mainly describe the process on individual level but not on teamwork level. This is especially surprising as most of the companies have multiple employees and usually need to work as a team to be successful to stay in the competition. Here, scholars divide the teams into two groups – empowered teams and self-managing teams. Self-managing teams have been associated with high productivity (Cohen & Ledford, 1994) (Goodman, Devadas, & Griffith-Hughson, 1988) (Trist, Susman, & Brown, 1977) (Wellins, Wilson, Katz, Laughlin, R. & Price, 1990), quality (Cohen & Ledford, 1994) (Wellins, Wilson, Katz, Laughlin, R. & Price, 1990), customer service (Wellins, Wilson, Katz, Laughlin, R. & Price, 1990), safety (Cohen & Ledford, 1994) (Goodman, Devadas, & Griffith-Hughson, 1988) (Trist, Susman, & Brown, 1977), job satisfaction (Cordery, Mueller, & Smith, 1991) (Wall, Kemp, Jackson, & Clegg, 1986), and organizational commitment (Cordery, Mueller, & Smith, 1991) (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999).

Kirkman and Rosen divide team empowerment into four dimensions: potency, meaningfulness, autonomy, and impact. Potency serves as a whole team belief that it can be effective. Potency is different from self-efficacy as it refers more to team effort, potency experiences develop collectively and potency refers to generalized effectiveness (Guzzo, Yost, Campbell, & Shea, 1993). Meaningfulness refers to a team's experiencing its tasks as important, valuable and worthwhile (Hackman, 1987) (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Usually people work in teams every day and therefore share their experiences with one another. This also includes the meaningfulness of different tasks and what kind of experiences they gain on solving different tasks. Autonomy is the degree to which team members experience substantial freedom,

independence and discretion in their work (Hackman, 1987) (Susman, 1976). Kirkman and Rosen comment as follows: „Important decisions are made and executed by teams. Thus, high levels of team autonomy may actually decrease individual autonomy as important decision making is shared rather than carried out alone and responsibility is diffused rather than granted to a single individual“ (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999, p. 59). Taking responsibility in solving tasks can be very stressful and usually it is much easier to share the responsibility, hear different opinions and make decisions together in a team. This is where team empowerment comes in more efficient than single employee empowerment.

In addition to exerting greater effort or “working harder”, empowered employees also seem to improve their performance by working “smarter” or by seeking out new and better ways of doing things. Bowen and Lawler noticed two forms of innovative behaviour resulting in performance gains: when frontline employees take rapid and spontaneous steps to “recover” from poor service delivery and adapt services to meet the idiosyncratic needs of customers, and when they move beyond reactive recovery to proactively redesigning processes and systems and creating new products and services.

However, the front office is not a single unit in the whole organization, it is one member of a bigger picture and is a piece which makes the organization one complete unit. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that team empowerment might not be enough to empower the front office employees. The organization holds a structure and the communication between departments has to be regulated as well. Also, the respect for one another’s work and the recognition from the higher level management towards the front office team is a crucial factor. This is why scholars brought out another type of empowerment – structural empowerment. The following subchapter will introduce this strategy in a closer view.

1.2 Structural empowerment

Peter K. Mills and Gerardo R. Ungson see empowerment at a different angle. They stay on a sceptical viewpoint when concerning employee empowerment arguing that „the empowerment of participants is a more effective way to facilitate stable exchanges and to sustain relational agreements“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 143). In their opinion, empowerment can only work as a positive method when it has some kind of structure. They add: „The success or failure of employee empowerment depends on the ability of the organization to reconcile the potential loss of control inherent in empowerment practices with the fundamental organizational need for goal congruence“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 143). So at some point the company has to understand that in order for the empowerment method to work, it is necessary to loosen the control over their employees and give them more control over making decisions. However, as it was explained beforehand, it is essential to have some kind of structure in this process. Mills and Ungson define control loss „as the slippage that takes place in control when subordinates may not understand what they are supposed to do or may not choose to do what is expected of them“ (Evans, 1975) (Williamson, 1967) (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 146). When the management loses control then it means that some control is gained by the employees. It is very uncertain because it can result in either constructive or destructive employee actions.

Mills and Ungson use a definition for structural empowerment as follows: „(structural empowerment) represents a formal horizontal decentralization of authority such that decisional power flows to employees from the formal structure“ (Mintzberg, 1979). This method gives the initiative of delegation of decision-making to the employees. In turn, this helps to rise the opportunities for employee responsibility and initiatives. In bigger companies this means more delegation but in smaller enterprises it contains more decision-making and taking initiative. What are the conditions that lead to structural empowerment? Mills and Ungson find that „structural empowerment arises from conditions of high uncertainty and information asymmetry in contexts where organizational participants exchange information and resources“ (Mills & Ungson,

2003, p. 144). This means that every employee is a carrier of information and they need to have mutual goals in order for the company to be fully functional. Without employee empowerment, this is not likely to occur in ways that lead to the desired performance (Astley & Zajac, 1991). It has been noted that employees have a big amount of energy and willpower to generate innovative ideas outside workplace but a true challenge is to initiate employees to use the same kind of energy at work. Mills and Ungson continue: „Viewed in this context, structural empowerment is the „enabling“ condition (Susman, 1976) under which stable and continuous exchanges in information and resources among organizational participants are facilitated and sustained“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 144).

Having listed several positive sides of employee empowerment it is clear that it has some downsides as well. The most important question is that how does the firm continue to control and coordinate as it continues to empower employees? It has been made certain that when giving initiative to employees in somewhat new situations, the old methods of controlling and monitoring the employees does not carry any meaning anymore. There has to be new ways of controlling the empowered employees. Mills and Ungson suggest the following: „In contrast, two other control mechanisms – organizational constitution and system-wide trust – are less obtrusive than traditional measures in that they facilitate individual empowerment and the realization of organizational goals through interlocking normative processes and trust building conditions. Since they are more appropriate for conditions of empowerment, we elaborate on them as control measures throughout... the paper“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, pp. 146-147). Here it can be seen that a new approach to employee control has been taken. It is suggested that mutual trust and organization based set norms are much more effective control measures as pure monitoring. Zald defines organizational constitution as „a set of agreements and understandings that defines the limits and goals of the group (collectivism) as well as the responsibilities and rights of participants standing in different relations to it“ (Zald, 1970, lk 225). The Oxford dictionary defines constitution as follows: „A body of fundamental principles or established precedents according to which a state or other organization is acknowledged to be governed“. Therefore it can be said that if an organization has developed a firm set of rules and norms which have to be followed by every employee, it is understood to every person where the boundaries

go. Organizational constitution sets boundaries to everyday work but leaves enough room for employee empowerment and self-development. But even more than this, the constitution is the value (normative) system that gives legitimacy to the worth of effort or resources by assisting the empowered employee in resolving nebulous issues concerning the proper way to behave (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 147).

Because the organizational constitution can be constructed as interlocking expectations (Schein, 1985), it provides the institutional framework from which the notion of trust emerges (Shapiro, 1987). Every individual receives constant information but one can never be sure if this received information is true or false since it is often incomplete. Since incomplete information is simply risky information, trust means an acceptance of risk (Coleman, 1990). The presence of trust reduces the need of contracts or costly control mechanisms in economic transactions (Evan, 1963) (Geertz, 1978) (Holmes, 1991). This serves to lubricate transactions across the empowerment boundary. However, trust always comes hand in hand with several risks. In employee empowerment the risk can go in both ways – managerial and employee. If the management trusts the employee too much then the management serves the risk of losing the control over the empowered employee. This may result in misuse of trust and negative impacts on the company. Also, if the employee receives too much trust from the management, it may result in wrong decisions caused by the lack of knowledge. Mills and Ungson find that „the process of earning trust requires the expenditures of resources by both the empowered employee and the organization. Essentially, trust has to be earned by the parties to the exchange through demonstrated behaviours by the empowered employee“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 148). The issue of trust is the basis of employee empowerment no matter if it concerns only one person or a whole party of employees. If the management has no trust in their employees but still tries to push the employee empowerment method to work it only results as superficial action and demotivates the employees even more.

However, all of these approaches describe the empowerment effect on a group of employees. This paper does describe the project on one specific team but the author believes that it is important to research the effects on an individual level because of the

different characteristics of each employee. To describe this issue more in depth, the author will introduce the psychological empowerment approach as well.

1.3 Psychological empowerment

Different scholars have linked psychological empowerment to several wellbeing indicators such as job satisfaction and work commitment (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Furthermore, as work engagement, psychological empowerment has shown important links with work motivation and positive outcomes (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Based on this, some authors have proposed that psychological empowerment may be an important predictor of work engagement (Bhatnagar, 2012) (Kimura, 2011) (Stander & Rothmann, 2010). Psychological empowerment is defined as a motivational concept composed of four dimensions: meaning, choice, competence and impact. Meaning corresponds to the value employees assign to their job according to their beliefs and standards. It is the fit between the requirements of a task or work goal and personal values or ideas. Choice refers to the degree to which an individual perceives that he can initiate and regulate his own actions. The core element of this concept is the feeling of self-determination (Quiñones, A, & De Witte, 2013, lk 128).

Competence is defined as the employees' beliefs in their capability to perform their tasks skilfully. It refers to the perception that one has required abilities to cope with different work situations (Spreitzer G. , 2007). Competence derives from the concept of self-efficacy, which promotes initiative, persistence, and greater effort to deal with difficult situations (Bandura, 1977). The last aspect, the impact, corresponds to the perception that employees' behaviours may influence results at work. It is the degree to which employees feel that they can make a difference through their behaviours, in order to accomplish their task goals (Quiñones, A, & De Witte, 2013, lk 129). Approached from the motivational perspective, psychological empowerment is thus not a job characteristic; instead it refers to a positive self-evaluation which influences wellbeing and motivation at work.

The aspects describing psychological empowerment from the employee's point of view are the following: leadership, high-performance managerial practices (such as participatory decision making, information sharing and training), social support, skill variety, task identity, and task significance. This kind of empowerment is more likely to be observed among employees who have been working in a particular organization for a longer period of time since all those qualities are beginning to show over a longer period of time (Spreitzer G. , 2007). It has been also stated by authors like Siebert et al. that when the employee gets comfortable in what he/she does, gains more self-confidence and is ready to take bigger risks in decisions, the employee feels psychologically empowered (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Laschinger et al, found that high levels of psychological empowerment were associated to high job satisfaction. In contrast, negative associations have been found between psychological empowerment and turnover intentions, stress, and strain (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2004) (Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997).

Moreover, the positive effects of psychological empowerment have become clear. Authors have claimed that this strategy even has positive effects on employees' health. Seiber, Silver, and Randolph, for example, found that psychological empowerment carries the influence of participative climate on job satisfaction and individual performance (Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004). Similar results were obtained by Albrecht and Andreetta, who studied the relationship between transformational leadership and organisational commitment via psychological empowerment (Albrecht & Andreetta, 2011). In sum, evidence shows that psychological empowerment is an important contributor of workers' well-being, either via its direct effect or by mediating the influence of job resources. All of this suggests that psychological empowerment helps to develop the employees, gives them self-confidence and thus enhance the motivation of the employees. Quiñones, Van den Broeck, and De Witte find in their study that empowerment corresponds to evaluations that people make their own experience of empowerment. As such, psychological empowerment refers to cognitive state or personal belief instead of a job characteristic (129).

What is also interesting is that psychological empowerment has a direct connection to structural empowerment which the author explained previously in this paper. Kimura

investigated the associations between structural empowerment (opportunity, information, support, resources, formal power, and informal power) and psychological empowerment (Kimura, 2011). As expected, psychological empowerment carried the influence of structural empowerment on work engagement. Higher levels of structural empowerment were associated with an increase in psychological empowerment, which then led to higher work engagement. On the same topic, Stander and Rothmann analysed the relationships among job insecurity, psychological empowerment, and work engagement (Stander & Rothmann, 2010). Results showed that psychological empowerment related positively to work engagement and negatively to job insecurity. The overall result of all the studies has shown that psychological empowerment fostered work engagement, which then led to higher levels of innovation.

1.4 The risks of employee empowerment

Ji-Eun Ye has written down the downsides and effects of employee empowerment in his article „7 Principles for Employee Empowerment“. He has brought out three main risks that managers can have when applying this method into use. Firstly, there is the question about the manager's own job security. He states the following: „They (managers) equate empowering employees to ceding control and fear it will backfire on them, endangering their position“. This is a natural fear that every manager may come across as no manager would like to have less power than their employees. There has to be a balance between the employees and the manager. The employees have to respect their manager but at the same time the manager has to be ready to share power in order to make the employees feel needed. When giving too much power to employees, the position of the manager becomes under a question.

Secondly, Ye brings out the issue of trust. He claims that „leaders may doubt their employees' ability to perform important tasks properly“. If the manager does not trust one's employees, it is almost impossible to delegate important tasks to them. The fear of failing the task hinders the empowerment process. In contrast, if the manager trusts the employees too much it may result in loss of control and bring back the issue of losing one's face. The issue of trust is also brought out by many other scholars who are

looking into this subject more in depth. For example, scholars like Dunphy and Bryant as well as Mishra and Spreitzer claim that trust plays a crucial role in teamwork, particularly in the case of self-managed teams within the organizations (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996) (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). Although the front office is a part of the hotel management, it does tend to self-manage itself as the group of people working side by side every day create their own systems and ways of overcoming the problems. Usually their own systems help to make the job easier but in some, the systems might do more harm than good to the whole image of the hotel, not to mention the financial loss of the hotel's profit.

Since trust is one of the most important factors in employee empowerment, it is necessary to explain this term in depth. Where does trust come from and why does it play the crucial role in empowerment. Mills and Ungson suggest a theory saying that there are two types of trust found in an organization – routine and basic. „Routine or „limited“ trust constitutes everyday relationships that are built up naturally over time. Routine trust entails a belief that a person has the competence to perform specific tasks under specific conditions (Bigley & Pearce, 1998)“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 149). Bigely and Pearce suggest that from repeated transactions people are able to make predictions about one another. Mills and Ungson, however, argue that trust is already embedded in social relationships claiming that „routine trust involves expectations that become an obligation or responsibility“ (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 149).

The other type of trust which Mills and Ungson bring out is basic trust. They describe this as follows: „Basic trust occurs in situations in which individuals have very little information about the objects of their trust (Rotter, 1980), and is recognizable by „the absence of an active appraisal process“ (Holmes, 1991, p. 82). Mills and Ungson believe that basic trust can make the organization very vulnerable as there is little knowledge about the actions of the empowered employee. They say that there are risks attached to the use of basic trust, for „the more complete the trust, the greater the potential gain from malfeasance“ (Granovetter, 1985, p. 491). Sheppard and Sherman add to this thought that the empowered employee's discretion and the organization's uncertainty of success around that individual's activities invites suspicion that there is the potential for the individual to behave in ways contrary to the interests of the

organization, primarily because the empowered employee's behaviour is often outside the purview of the organization and therefore difficult to monitor (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). All in all, it can be stated that basic trust is based more on emotions and mutual communication between the organization and the employee. Since basic trust involves a high level of uncertainty and has a high risk of misuse by the empowered employee, this method is rarely used in organizations or is only used in case of close relations between the employee and the organization.

Thirdly, there is the problem of communication. The insufficient amount of communication may leave employees unprepared to take on responsibility. This makes the manager feel that if one expects the things to be done right then one has to do the task itself. This hinders the delegation of autonomy to employees. The importance of communication is critical in every company, especially if there are a large number of employees involved. Every little detail has to be acknowledged to every employee in order for the company to run smoothly. Lack of communication affects, firstly, the relationship between employees and, secondly, between employees and customers.

What is also important to employee empowerment is that the managers must fully explain the additional tasks to their employees. Empowered employees are expected to use discretion in making decisions. However, one can assume that the basis of the decisions, particularly the information used by employees, is not easily accessible, verified or even deemed appropriate by the organisation (Baumol, 1961). The enlarged responsibilities may confuse both sides of the party. If the employees do not understand what is expected of them, they feel confused and most probably the result is not what was expected of them. On the other hand, if the managers are not sure if their employees fully understand the task and feel confused about the situation whether the amount of trust put into the employees is too much or too little, it also leads to unwanted results and eventually the manager does the work itself. It is essential that the manager know the capabilities and strengths of their individual employees. By knowing the capabilities of every employee makes it easier for the manager to divide new tasks between them. Here, additional training may also be needed and constant feedback is essential.

The key to employee empowerment is motivation without the employee actually noticing it. Giving a task to an employee that he or she has never done before takes the

employee out of its comfort zone. The feeling of accomplishment is what raises motivation and makes them feel that they are capable of much more than they presumed. The challenge is finding the right balance in assignments. If the work is too difficult, it can be intimidating. But if it is not difficult enough it will not force employees to go beyond the comfort zone. Taking the employees beyond their comfort zone, leaders can help them accumulate experience and gain confidence for bigger challenges.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the composer is going to introduce the methods used in order to gather information. In order to find out how the front office employees feel about their current work, what needs to be improved and what are their expectances, she did a quantitative research using a written form questionnaire as the research instrument (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was presented to the front office employees, in total of eight copies. The time period for answering the questionnaire was two weeks, since the employees work in shifts and do not work every day. The author received all eight copies and made the conclusions based on the received answers. The questionnaire included questions about the satisfaction level of the employees, the level of information flow at the front office, the need of additional training, the issue of trust and overall work relationship between colleagues.

The main method used in this paper is the case study method. The author decided to use this method in order to introduce the situation among the front office employees before applying the employee empowerment strategy. The second aim is to describe the process of applying the empowerment strategy, how it was received by the employees, which kind of difficulties the author had during the process and which were the outcomes of this process. The case study method was applied at the beginning of January and the paper describes the development process until the middle of April.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 Case study and questionnaire results

The author is going to start by explaining the situation at Laulasmaa spa hotel before the employee empowerment strategy. Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel was reopened in spring 2011. Since then, the management has done everything to make this hotel work as effectively as possible. Until autumn 2013, the hotel managed to work without a front office manager but since the hotel gained popularity and more needed to be done for effective customer service, the management decided to hire a front office manager as well. There were several reasons why this position was needed. For example, the front office department lacked order and method, there was one person missing who would transfer and manage all the information concerning customer service, no proper system was created under which the employees could work and there were no set rules for the employees to follow.

The first task was to understand how the work process had been done so far, what kind of methods had been used to solve different problems, what were the main issues that came up on a daily basis. It became very clear that the main issue is the uncertainty of the employees, not knowing what is fully expected of them and what kind of information and tools they are allowed to use in everyday work. Since this hotel offers work to 150 persons, the information flow is constant. Quite often there had been a situation where the much needed information got lost and the customer service was directly affected by this. This issue was also looked upon in the questionnaire under the question “Is there enough information to complete your everyday tasks?”. The answer was quite obvious – only one employee said that the amount of information is sufficient for everyday work.

It became clear that there is a big issue with trust between employees and managers as well as in between employees themselves. The lack of trust was caused by the lack of

information and professional training. The problem of trust and insufficient training was handled in the questionnaire as well. The author asked “Does your direct manager trust you enough to let you make important decisions on your own initiative?”. Only one respondent felt that the direct manager has a sufficient amount of trust in her employees.

Also, since there were no set rules on which the employees could rely on or obtain information from, no one knew their boundaries and solved each problem as they thought it was best. There was a clear need of standards, rules and information which everyone could understand the same. As Bowen and Lawler have brought out in their study, the knowledge and work related possessed information is crucial when trying to motivate the employees. The author first suggested to compile a set of rules and norms for the employees to follow. This way, all the tasks and requirements can be understood in the same way by everyone.

Compiling norms is a big task since the front office department is supposed to base on this document. It took a lot of co-ordinating and consulting with the general manager before the both managers could be happy about the rules. However, since the front office department had worked without a manager for a long period of time already, the norms document was not received as willingly as the author had hoped for. There had to be a lot of explaining done how these norms help to simplify their everyday work and avoid mistakes when dealing with customers. After explaining the importance of set rules and norms, the employees agreed that these are needed and slowly started to work according what was required. After two months, it could be seen how the employees felt more confident in what they do, working with a smile on their faces.

When discussing over the issue of trust, it could be noted that this topic takes a lot more time. Since the hospitality industry has one peculiarity, the employees change very often, it is difficult to trust all the employees. The same goes for the employees, since they change so often, it is difficult for them to trust the manager from day one. The author notes that usually it takes about three to four months for the trust to build up between the employee and manager. Here, the author asked one other additional question: “Do you feel that your direct manager listens to you and takes your wishes/propositions into account?” and received somewhat alarming results. It became clear that most of the employees wish that the upper level managers would consider

their propositions as well and wish that there was less ignorance from the managerial level towards the front office department.

Normally, the front office employees work in two or three shifts. This means that the trust between the employees themselves has to be flawless. If one employee makes a mistake or delivers a perfect customer service, it is almost certain that the customer feedback reaches this employee in three or four days later. Therefore the co-operation between co-workers must run smoothly as well relying on trust and support to one another. The author asked the employees a question “Do your colleagues support you enough in problematic situations?” and to her surprise, this question received all positive answers as well. However, here the author feels that the employees do not discuss and analyse the problems in depth. They use somewhat stomp solutions and are not open to innovative solutions.

The topic of additional training is also something that needs to be looked upon in this paper. As the author mentioned before, the team of the front office is changing rapidly and new people are hired almost every two to three months. This raises a lot of questions that are controversial. If a person is hired and he/she does not have any previous experience in this field, then additional training seems like a logical step to do. Most of the experiences are learned in practice but extra cases need to be taught separately. For example, if there happens to be a very difficult customer, then the information about handling these situations has to be learned beforehand. However, knowing that one team lasts maximum two or three months, is it worth spending money on every single person who is hired to the team? Most of the managers feel that it is not worth the expenses and let the employees obtain their knowledge from everyday success and failure. The author also wanted to know if professional training would help the employees by asking „Would additional training motivate you to accomplish better results?“ and the answer was positive in case of every respondent.

This topic does not apply to these workers who have been working on the same position for a number of years already. But this, too, is controversial from its own point of view. Extra training is always beneficiary, giving new experiences, new viewpoints and builds confidence. The question is that if a person has worked in the same organization and on the same job for four-five years then does he/she really need any additional training? In

most of the cases, the employee knows all the procedures by heart, knows how to behave in certain situations and where to turn in case of any need of assistance. The author also wondered if there was the need of additional training. It became clear quite soon that additional training is something which is missing from their everyday work and would motivate them to work harder and reach for better results. All in all, it can be said that additional training is something that motivates the employees but has to be well thought through by the managers if its extra costs are beneficial to the organization in the long term or not.

What was also brought out by the employees was the notion that the upper level managers do not treat them as equals and do not take into consideration their proposals, requests and remarks. The author asked the employees a question “What would you like to change concerning your everyday work for you to enjoy your everyday work?” and received answers like “the attitude of the managers towards the front office” or “more trust from the managers” or “more information from the managers”. If a front office employee has a good idea which he/she would like to share with others in order to make the job tasks easier, he/she does not have the courage to present it to the higher level managers because the response is usually negative. The author compiled a question about this topic as well asking “Do you feel like suggesting any changes to enhance the work but do not want to/do not dare to make the suggestions?” and she received three positive answers and five negative answers. This is alarming for the whole organization as some of the suggestions can be innovative and beneficiary for the organization. The “other” option was added to the questionnaire in order for the respondents to explain their positive answer.

The respondents who chose the “other” option explained their answer as follows: the upper level managers do not trust them enough and seem to suggest that the front office employees’ suggestions tend to be superficial and not thought through. This makes them feel like they are not a part of the organization and are only there to follow everyone else’s orders. Knowing how important the front office employee is to the hotel’s image, it should not be the impression that the employees should get. Front office employee is the business card of the hotel. He/she is the first person that the customer steps into contact with and first impressions are crucial in service management.

Under this paragraph, the author can also link the topic of rewards. It is natural that if an employee shows good results and brings benefit to the company, there has to be some kind of a reward. Sadly, this is not the situation in Estonia. It is a rare occasion if the manager compliments the employee for good work or mentions someone who has done well at a board meeting. From the motivational point of view, even verbal gratitude is what gives the employee the sense of being needed and that whatever job he/she does is appreciated by the managers as well. The lack of gratitude was also brought out by the front office employees in Laulasmaa spa. The author also asked the employees to respond to the question “Do you feel that your everyday work is appreciated?” and only two employees felt that what they do is really beneficial to the organization. The other respondents expressed their thoughts saying that the management leaves a fake impression that everything is good when some extra tasks have to be done by the front office employees. Even if the task is executed perfectly, no appreciation or thanking is given. This is what is considered the least motivating factor of this profession.

This topic also includes another question which the author asked from the employees. The question was “What would motivate to do your job even better besides monetary motivation?” and the answers given were alarming. The most popular answer was appraisal, kind words for accomplishment, sincerity and trust from the managers and other departments. One response was particularly precise – “Attitude. Sincere, not a fake “pat on the shoulder”. Trust.”. This shows the least motivating factors in their everyday work and an area for the front office manager which needs some immediate attention.

The last point that needed changing in this particular hotel was the movement of information. Since this is a large establishment with over 150 workers, the amount of information that flows is enormous. The structure of the organization is not that complicated. Most of the information starts from the general manager, moves down to the sales manager and sales department, from there to the head chef and food and beverage department, administrative department, housekeeping department, spa department or the front office. The biggest amount of information is received from the sales department and usually concerns critical information about guests, packages, prices and everything which is concerned with excellent customer service. It can be said

that the hotel's front office is the one place where all information should be given, especially everything that concerns customers and customer service. Sadly, some of the times the information does not reach the destination it was supposed to go. This causes normally very big problems, misunderstandings and is often invidious. The miscommunication could be caused by several factors. Either someone forgets to pass the information, technical problems with the e-mail systems, the information is not thought to be important enough to pass it to the front office or some other reason. Experience has shown that every little piece of information is important and helps to avoid mishaps, stress and misunderstandings.

To conclude the observation and analysis section, it can be said that the front office team has several issues which need to be looked upon. The main problem, which the ladies have, is the issue of trust. This applies to the trust between the employees and the direct manager, between the employees and the upper level managers in the organisation and also between the employees themselves. As it was mentioned beforehand, trust is the key factor in every organisation which builds self-confidence and motivates employees to reach higher goals. The second biggest issue is the lack of training and professional information the employees need to use in everyday work. Most of the front office employees have never participated in customer service trainings and thus have very little knowledge how to react in different situations and what are the standards in high quality customer service in hospitality industry. Over time, the employees had developed their own methods of problem solving. However, this does not mean that all of these methods are the best solutions to each problem and in some cases may even turn the situation worse than it originally was. This is why professional training was so highly requested by the employees.

The movement of information is one of the issues as well in the organisation. Since there are a lot of employees in this establishment who are working in several different departments, the information can get lost very easily. The amount of information which needs to move between different departments is remarkable and usually concerns the customers who need to be dealt with on the same day. The employees brought out the point that the crucial information does not often reach the correct employee and this makes their everyday work even more difficult. Due to this, the front office ladies feel

insecure and do not have the courage to make independent decisions. All of these issues need to be solved in order to make the front office function effectively and raise the customer service level to high quality.

Lastly, the author would like to point out the balance between the positive and negative answers to the questionnaire. The author believes that this analysis also helps to evaluate the present situation at the hotel's front office atmosphere.

This comparison brings out the weaker and stronger aspects which the employees value in their everyday work and give the front office manager an overview what she still needs to change in order to improve the whole situation.

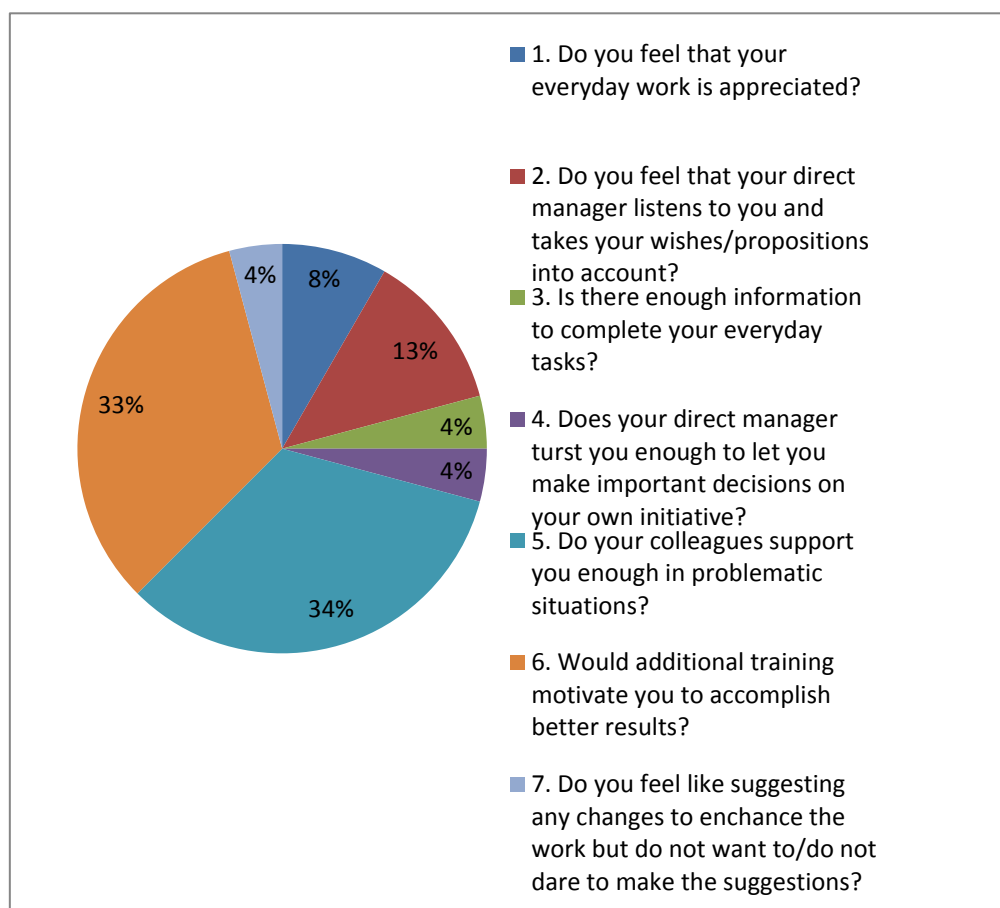


Figure 1. The positive answers to the questionnaire (compiled by the author)

Figure 1 brings all the questions and the percentage of the positive answers from the employees. It can be said that two of the questions were answered unanimously and the whole team was on the same opinion that the team is very supportive and professional training is definitely needed in order to perform better in everyday work.

This diagram also shows that most of the answers got hesitant answers and did not portray a picture of a healthy working environment which motivates employees to reach for higher goals.

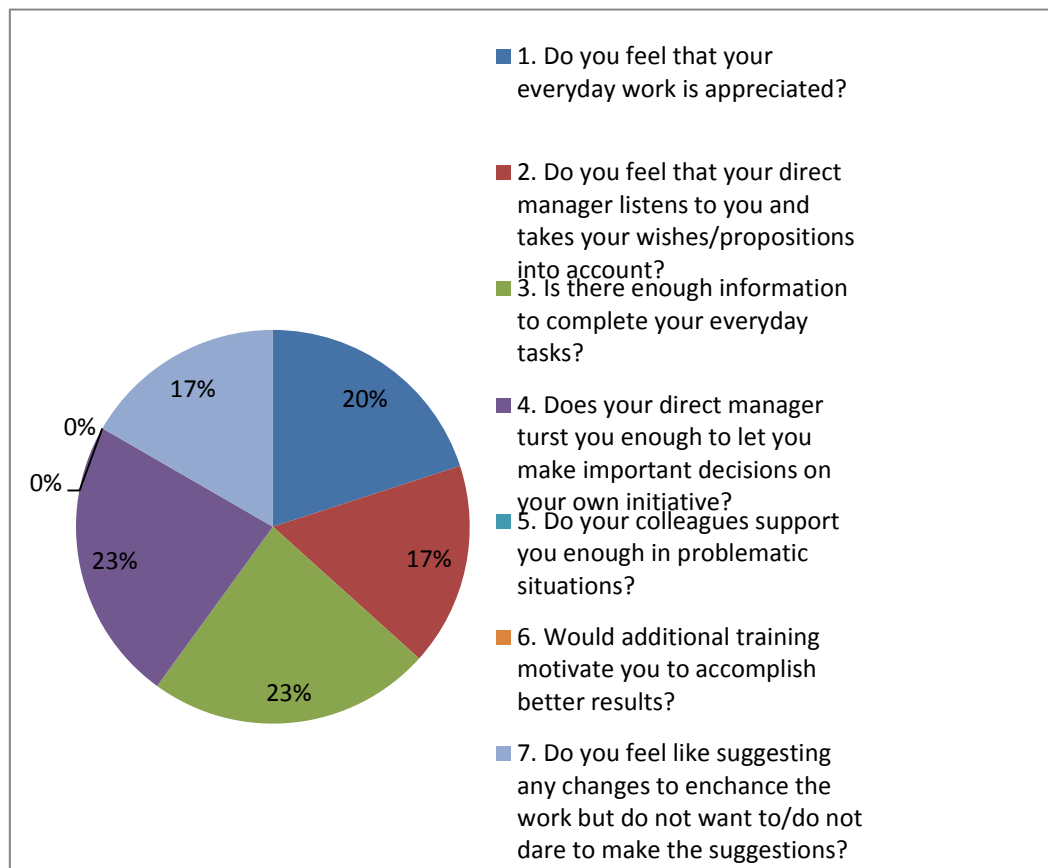


Figure 2. The negative answer of the employees (compiled by the author)

Figure 2 portrays the negative answers which were given by the front office employees. The author found it interesting that there was so much negativity among the front office employees. It was visible that there was no trust among the front office employees and other departments whatsoever making it difficult to work effectively for every side of this organisation. The information flow inside the organisation was ranked poorly as well as well as the point that the direct manager does not show enough trust towards the employees. These were the aspects that got the most negative feedback and these matters needed to be solved in the first order. This did not mean that the other answers needed to be on the background. All of them were serious issues which needed immediate attention.

3.2 Applying the employee empowerment strategy

After analysing the questionnaire results and the overall situation among front office employees, the author decided to start applying the empowerment strategy. She first had to decide which kind of approach would be suitable in this particular hotel and collective. The author decided that the team empowerment option would not be beneficiary in this case as the front office team is changing frequently. Of course, even though the employees are changing very often, they are still a part of the team but as she described in Chapter 1, empowerment needs trust and building a trustworthy relationship is time consuming. Another option was to use structural empowerment but this seemed to be a little too big of a challenge for the author. Since Laulasmaa spa hotel has five different departments and every department has its own manager to run the employees, the author felt that it would be wise to first test the strategy in her own department and in case of success, she would suggest the other managers to apply this system as well. The author does not eliminate the option of structural empowerment in this organisation but before she has not proved its positive effect on the employees, she did not apply this approach on her employees.

The author decided to apply employee empowerment strategy to only some of the employees, particularly on the employees who had been working at the organization for a longer period of time and already knew all the systems and procedures which had to be followed but felt the lack of motivation because of the work routine and uncertain instructions. This task proved to be a challenge for the author at first since she was the newest member of the team and was not familiar with the current procedures held at Laulasmaa spa's front office. One other factor made the task more complicated – the author was the youngest member of the team and had somewhat problems of making herself the authority at the reception. However, since the author was hired to the organization to build a well-organized and motivated front office team then the determination was big even though this profession was new to the author as well.

The first task was to establish a set of rules for the front office employees which defined the mannerisms, rules about what is allowed for them to do and what is not and also the points what was expected of the front office team. The author decided to compile the set

of rules based on her own previous experiences selecting out all the procedures which had worked well beforehand. However, every organization is different and the procedures had to be modified. After two weeks of hard work and constant discussion with the general manager the new set of rules was compiled and introduced to the front office team. As the author presumed, the rules were not accepted with opened hands and made the front office team feel like rules were imposed on them limiting their freedom and rights. It took a considerable amount of time of explaining that the rules are meant to make their everyday work easier and this document is something they can always rely on in case of some kind of controversy.

The next step was to make the employees feel more confident in making decisions. The insecurity became clear to the author after three days of working in the organization. It was especially visible during weekends when the front office was the only team in the building to solve all the problems since the management works from Monday to Friday. The front office manager is the person who the front office team can always contact in case of any questions. The first weekends were hectic for the manager as her telephone was constantly ringing. The employees asked questions to which they already knew answers but were too uncertain to make decisions themselves. It became clear to the manager that this all had to change since she was working already 7 days per week.

She began to seek ways to encourage the employees, to make them more motivated and confident in what they do. She did not want the motivation to be monetary but rather something which helped to develop the employees as well. The author came across the topic of employee empowerment and this seemed the perfect option to increase the motivation in the team. After getting familiar how employee empowerment works, she slowly began to apply all these methods on her team as well. Whenever there was a question that the employees had, she decided to answer with another question like “What would you do?” or “What do you think is the right solution?”. This made the employees to analyse and think of alternative solutions to different problems.

Whenever there was a correct answer, the manager would praise the employee verbally and encourage him/her to take further initiative in decision making. However, if the answer was not correct, the manager would answer “Yes, this is one way of looking at this problem but I think my version is better this time” and then fully explain why the

manager's option was correct this time. It is essential that the employees fully understand the consequence of every action. The manager also encouraged the employees to suggest innovative solutions and apply them in action if the option turned out to be beneficiary to the organization. The manager could see the positive effects of this technique after three weeks from applying. She could see the confidence building up among the front office team and she received a lot less phone calls during weekends. The first weekend with no calls occurred after a month and a half the theory was applied.

The other positive effect which came out of this theory was the point that the employees started to support one another much more as well. They communicated more with one another, tried to find solutions to problems together and started to enjoy their everyday work. Even though the questionnaire results showed that the co-operation between front office employees work well, the author could see the enhancement in positive thinking and communication between the employees whenever there was a difficult situation and a problem needed to be solved. They discussed different solution options and chose together the best option. Also, the communication and co-operation between different departments improved relieving stress and conflicts in communication.

The author analysed the before and after situation based on the Deming quality circle (see Figure 3). This theory has four main points under which the managers usually organise their work.

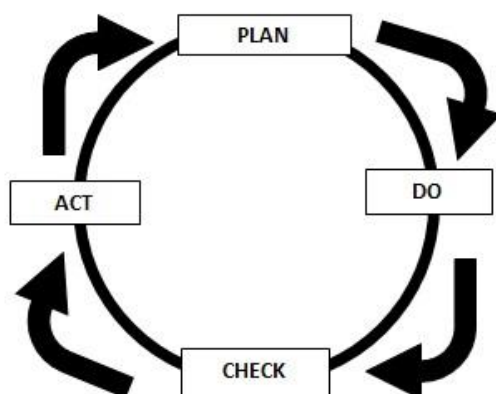


Figure 3. Deming quality circle (compiled by the author)

The first task was to observe the overall situation in the organization, get acquainted with the systems and co-workers. From there it was easier to make a plan of what needs to be done and how to improve the current situation. Once the plans were made and coordinated with the general manager it was time to put the plans to action. This phase is important for collecting data for charting and analysis in the following steps. The author took an observant role in this step and wrote down all the issues she noticed in the front office employees' everyday work. She noticed the lack of confidence, confusion in some particular problems and lack of trust among co-workers and other employees at the organization. At this stage, the author also noticed the lack of system and method in the front office employees' everyday work. She began the planning stage finding possible solutions to all of the problems the employees had. She first planned to compile a set of rules and standards for the employees to make them work for a common goal. She also planned to work on the employees individually to motivate them in their everyday work. Since she had recently read about the employee empowerment method, she decided to put this theory into action.

The following step for the author was to check the results of the observation and part and compare the results to the expectations in the planning part. The author saw that the best option in this case was to use the psychological planning strategy and she started applying this on the front office employees. However, not all the employees got to be part of this process as the author made a selection to only test this strategy on the employees who had worked in this organisation for a longer period of time. She also compiled a set of norms and rules for the employees to be followed. This process involved the hotel's general manager as well and together with the front office manager they introduced the set of rules to the front office ladies.

From there on it was easy to make adjustments and see which part of the process needed to be changed. As it turned out, it was not that easy for the author to imply these norms on the employees. There was a lot of opposition from the ladies as they felt like they are forcefully placed into frames and their freedom is taken away from them. It needed some extra explanation from the front office manager and the general manager to make the employees see that the rules are made to make their job easier and unequivocal. The empowerment process did not go as smoothly as the author had hoped for. It had a slow

start and at some point the empowered employees started to feel too comfortable with their newly assigned powers. The author felt like she was losing control over the employees and had to reassess the whole situation. She talked to the employees and explained the boundaries they are required to follow. The author also realised how thin the line between empowerment and losing control can be.

The final step was to act according to the previous changes and make sure that this step would be executed perfectly. She continued to act according to the psychological empowerment strategy and saw the effects of this strategy in everyday work as well. The results are still not fully visible as the process is quite slow but the author is positive that if everything continues to go according to plan, the outcome will bring a remarkable change for the better within the organisation. The Deming quality cycle is used widely in bigger and smaller organizations all over the world and it has been proven to be a successful model for enhancing the work of different departments. The author states that this model helped her to analyze the whole process much more deeply and it was easier for the author to calculate her next steps in improving the team. She also states that she will most definitely introduce this system to the other managers as well to improve the work relationship within every single department and also within the whole organisation well. If all of the departments feel the same kind of motivation and work for the same goals, it would enhance the performance of the whole organisation in image and profitability.

4. FINDINGS CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This part of the paper is going to explain the outcomes of the thesis research in the meaning of whether employee empowerment concept works at Laulasmaa spa hotel and is it beneficiary to apply this strategy on the front office employees working at this organisation. This chapter is also going to give recommendations for future actions in this section for further enhancement in employee empowerment strategy at Laulasmaa spa hotel.

The question of this paper was: “How employee empowerment strategy works in Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel”, and after thorough theoretical background research and the analysis of a written questionnaire among front office employees, the author succeeded in answering the main question. The topic was especially interesting to the author as she recently started working in this organisation and had never had any contact with the front office manager position before. She distinguished the problems which the front office employees encountered on a daily basis and sound out that the main issue was the lack of motivation in their everyday work.

This was caused by many different factors which were all brought out by the front office employees in the questionnaire which the author had composed for them. The main issue that the employees had was the issue of trust. It became clear that the employees were insecure in their everyday work because they did not know what was exactly expected of them. This in turn makes the upper level managers difficult to trust the front office and makes everything a so called dead circle. In addition to this, the front office employees found it difficult to trust the upper level managers as well making their everyday work very stressful and hardly worth the effort of reaching for better results.

In order to make the situation better, the author decided that the employee empowerment strategy works the best in this case. She was determined to enhance the self-confidence of the front office employees, to motivate them to reach higher goals and encourage them to make innovative suggestions in order to improve their working conditions. The author applied the psychological empowerment strategy in some of the employees in the front office team. Since the employees had been working in this organisation for a longer period of time and had developed their own comfort zone, it was not easy to bring in innovative solutions to their everyday work. It became clear to the author that the effect of this strategy is going to take time and it is a long term process demanding the full attention from both the managers and employees.

Also, one other important result became clear from this case study. As the author explained in the first chapter, it is crucial to know the balance between empowerment and losing all control over the empowered employees. The author experienced some of this as well during the experiment when the employees started to make decisions which were not theirs to make. The author believes that this situation occurred mainly because she did not explain the boundaries well enough to the employees and took the whole situation for granted.

Although the empowerment process takes some time to show some results, some of them already became visible during three weeks into the process and the first breakthrough was after one and a half months after the empowerment strategy was applied. The author could see the confidence building up in the front office employees, the smiles on their faces when they were working and less panic in stressful situations. They began to analyse the situations more on their own calculating the solution options and choosing the most appropriate one for a particular problem. There still occurs some hesitation in certain situations but it has a diminishing trend. The author will continue to work with this theory to further enhance the job quality among the front office employees.

Since this topic is not widely used in Estonia's organisations and has no feedback to analyse, the author suggests a wider use of this strategy in other organisations as well. This approach has shown great results in many different countries enhancing the work quality and raising the motivation of the employees without having to discuss the

monetary issues. The author believes that this approach is a great alternative in employee motivation having beneficial effects for both the employees and the managers running the organisation. The issue of employee motivation usually peaks with salary negotiations and is often stressful to both sides of the discussion. The author believes that it has much bigger effect when showing to the employee that one is valuable to the organisation and the employee has a chance to develop oneself.

Although some results were already visible at Laulasmaa spa, it became clear to the author that working only with the front office employees has little effect on their enhancement. The author suggests that the other department managers worked on their employees as well with the same strategy. This would minimise the communication issues between different departments, would reduce the stress levels inside each department and would enhance the co-operation between different departments as well resulting in the whole organisation working as one team towards one goal.

CONCLUSION

The topic of employee empowerment is a process that needs time to show results. It became clear to the author that this subject needs profound background information analysis. Every aspect of employee empowerment needs to be well thought through in order to avoid the misuse of power sharing. Also it is important to keep in mind that employee empowerment consists of many different aspects. Bowen and Lawler give the best definition as follows: empowerment is an “approach to service delivery” entailing various management practices aimed at sharing four organizational “ingredients” with frontline employees: information about the organization’s performance, rewards based on the organization’s performance, knowledge that enables employees to understand and contribute to organizational performance, and power to make decisions that influence organizational direction and performance (1992, 32).

Historically, employee empowerment dates back to the mid 70’s and the theory goes back a long time but the implementation of this theory is quite new. The topic of employee empowerment has risen into focus among company managers because monetary motivation has lost its former attractiveness among employees and it is not enough anymore to demand better results from the employees. In today’s rapidly developing society, self-development and the sense of accomplishment are the driving forces which make the employees motivated. As the author mentioned beforehand, there are several different types of empowerment, each of which is a crucial component in the complete picture of a well-managed organization.

The most used approach is team empowerment as most of the organisations work on a team level and co-operation between colleagues is crucial. It is proved that when motivating the whole team together, the members of the team start to support each other as well, thus enhancing the trust between the employees and motivating every member of the team to reach for higher goals. Bowen and Lawler noticed two forms of innovative behaviour resulting in performance gains: when frontline employees take rapid and spontaneous steps to “recover” from poor service delivery and adapt services

to meet the idiosyncratic needs of customers, and when they move beyond reactive recovery to proactively redesigning processes and systems and creating new products and services.

On the other hand, in some teams it is not wise to look the bigger picture and motivate the whole team. It is more useful to take one or two employees from the team and raise their motivation as high as possible. This is especially beneficial among these employees who have been working in an organisation for a longer period of time, have developed a sense of routine in their everyday work and lost motivation to aim for higher goals. Single employee empowerment technique is best described in psychological empowerment approach. Individual motivation makes the employee feel that he/she is necessary for the organisation, that the managers are taking the employee as an individual, not just as a part of some team. Quiñones and De Witte have stated that the core element of this concept is the feeling of self-determination. Self-development and the sense of accomplishment is the main force of motivation besides monetary motivation.

Lastly, every organisation has a structure – different departments, different ways of information movement and different ways of working. The scholars have defined one other approach of empowerment – structural empowerment. This type of motivation comprehends all the different structural units of an organisation. The motivation starts from the upper level managers and goes down to the very bottom of the organisation's structure unit. This approach requires a sufficient amount of control which is the key word for this strategy as well. Scholars like Mills and Ungson have stated the same saying that whenever there is the issue of control, there are some risks of losing one. Mills and Ungson define control loss „as the slippage that takes place in control when subordinates may not understand what they are supposed to do or may not choose to do what is expected of them“ (Evans, 1975) (Williamson, 1967) (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 146). To conclude the different approaches of empowerment, it can be stated that in order to successfully motivate the employees, one has to be aware of the pros and cons of the approach, has to be ready to take risks (the loss of control, loss of one's face, and the disbelief of the employees in this process), and has to fully commit to the empowerment process.

The author tried to apply all the aspects of this definition into practise in order to enhance the motivation of the front office employees in Laulasmaa spa hotel. The combination of observation and a written questionnaire gave the author an overview of what needed to be changed and which directions to take in order to apply the empowerment strategy. Since the front office team is in constant change, the author decided to use the psychological empowerment strategy and choose two employees who had been working in the organisation for several years. After distinguishing the main problems that the employees stated, she decided to compile a set of rules which defined the dos and don'ts of this profession. The aim for this was that the employees had something to rely on in case of any contradictions. Not everything went as according to plan as the employees were not open to changes especially because they had been working without a manager for several years and had developed their own systems of everyday work.

After some thorough explanation and communication, the situation worked out and the employees saw the point of the rules as well. Then the author decided that it was time to make the next step and start with the employee empowerment strategies. Since the front office team is in constant movement and the employees change very often, it seemed reasonable to test these strategies only on employees who had been working in this team for a longer period of time. The biggest challenge was to make the employees feel more secure in what they do and make them feel that their every effort is appreciated by all of the higher level managers as well. She started by raising their self-confidence by answering questions with questions and making the employees suggest their own solutions. Whenever the solution was correct, the manager would praise them and encourage them to continue the same kind of enthusiastic approach towards innovative ideas. If the answer turned out to be incorrect, the manager would explain why this solution would not work and suggest them a better solution.

After some period of time, approximately two months, the manager could see the results of encouragement. The employees started to act more confident in problematic situations, were eager to find solutions and suggest innovative ideas to further enhance their everyday work. However, there emerged a downside as well. As the author explained beforehand in this paper, there is a very thin line between empowerment and

simply losing one's power in total. In this case, the employees started to feel overconfident in what they do and make decisions which were not theirs to make. The manager discovered this in quite an early stage and managed to explain the boundaries as well within the extra power that was trusted to them. It has to be born in mind still that this is a long term process and not all of the results are visible yet. The issue of trust and making the information move between the different structures are the key aspects when establishing employee empowerment strategies.

During the period of composing this thesis, the author also had to opportunity to send her employees to a training. The training consisted of higher level customer service advice and also motivational tips to keep the front office employees motivated in their everyday work. As it became clear from the survey, this kind of training was one aspect which the employees wanted to experience. The author could see the changes in attitude towards everyday work from the first day of training. The second day gave them even more motivation and confidence to say what is on their mind and share their own opinion as well. The training was held in two sessions and in both cases there was a lively discussion between the employees about the problems they have and how to overcome these issues as a team.

After the training sessions, the author summoned a meeting with the front office employees and went over the training sessions. The author suggested that she does not want to compose the customer service standards alone but she would rather discuss the important points with the employees and set the standards together with them. By doing this, she saw what was important for the employees when talking about the customer service and also got the chance to express to express her own point of view as well. The author noticed that the employees were very motivated to further enhance their work and reacted positively to setting the customer service standards altogether.

To sum up it can be said that employee empowerment is a strategy that needs more looking into and more development as it has proven to work in Laulasmaa spa hotel and continues to motivate the front office employees in order to further enhance their everyday work and to encourage them to suggest innovative solutions to problems which have been in this business for a longer period of time. The author answers the current thesis' hypothesis by saying that employee empowerment strategy has a positive

effect on the front office employees and does act as an alternative motivational option as a counterweight to monetary motivation. Although this topic dates back to the 70's, it has not been put into practise on a wider basis and thus it lacks some practical feedback. The author is determined to continue with the strategy at Laulasmaa spa hotel and continues to investigate how employee empowerment concept affects the work outcome of the front office employees.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Do you feel that your everyday work is appreciated?

- Yes
- No

Do you feel that your direct manager listens to you and takes your wishes/propositions into account?

- Yes
- No

Is there enough information to complete your everyday tasks?

- Yes
- No

Does your direct manager trust you enough to let you make important decisions on your own initiative?

- Yes
- No

Do your colleagues support you enough in problematic situations?

- Yes
- No

What would you like to change concerning your everyday work for you to enjoy your everyday work?

Would additional training motivate you to accomplish better results?

- Yes
- No

Do you feel like suggesting any changes to enhance the work but do not want to/do not dare to make the suggestions?

If „yes“ please explain in the „other“ box

- Yes
- No
- Other

What would motivate to do your job even better besides monetary motivation?

Appendix 2. Pictures of Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel



Picture 1. The location of Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel



Picture 2. The outside view of Laulasmaa spa and conference hotel

SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN / ANNOTATSIOON

TÖÖTAJA JÕUSTAMISE KONTSEPTSIOONI VÄLJATÖÖTAMNE LAULASMAA SPA- JA KONVERENTSIHOTELLIS

Mitmed uuringud on tõestanud, et klienditeeninduse sektor on Eestis üks kõige madalamalt tasustatud töövaldkondi. Samuti kuulub sinna alla ka hotellimajandus ja hotelli vastuvõtu töötajate töötasu. Võrreldes hotelli vastuvõtutöötajate töökormust, vastutuse määra ning teenitud töötasu, peab nentima, et selles sektoris tuleb teha suuremad korrektuurid. Kuna töötasu ja töömahu tasakaal on tugevalt paigast ära, siis tahes tahtmata mõjub see ka töötajate motivatsioonile teha oma tööd täies mahus ning võimalikult kvaliteetselt. See omakorda mõjutab kogu ettevõtte imagot, sest hotelli vastuvõtutöötaja on hotelli visiitkaardiks. Kliendile loodud esmamulje väsinud, pahurast ja tuimast töötajast, ei too kasu ei hotellile ega ka seal töötavatele inimestele.

Põhiline töötajate motivatsiooniallikas on siiski olnud rahaline tunnustamine kas palgatõusu või preemia näol. Käesolev magistritöö uurib alternatiivseid võimalusi töötajate motiveerimiseks ilma rahalise faktorita. Ühe võimalusena näeb töö autor töötajate jõustamise meetodikat ning käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on uurida kas töötaja jõustamise kontseptsioon kannab oma eesmärgi Laulasmaa spa- ja konverentsihotelli vastuvõtutöötajate kollektiivis. Taoline lähenemine on kasutusel olnud juba 70ndatest aastatest, kuid Eesti töömaasikul on see konkreetne teooria veel uus ning tundmatu. Mujal maailmas, eeskätt Ameerika Ühendriikides, on töötaja jõustamise strateegia saanud väga palju positiivset vastukaja ning ka kõige suuremate ettevõtete juhid kasutavad antud strateegiat oma töötajate motiveerimiseks. Seetõttu otsustas töö autor ka Laulasmaa spa- ja konverentsihotellis kasutada antud strateegiat.

Autor tegi põhjaliku taustauuringu töötaja jõustamise strateegia kohta tutvudes erinevate vaatenurkadega ning vaagides erinevaid ohtusid mis selle teooria kasutusele võtmisega

võivad kaasneda. Antud teema definitsiooni ümber on olnud suuri vaidlusi ning ühest mõistet töötaja jõustamisele ei olegi leitud. Kõige kompaktsema ning üksikasjalikuma tulemuseni jõudsid kaks teadlast – Bowen ning Lawler – kes leidsid, et paljud jõustamise programmid nurjuvad kui toetuda pelgalt võimu jagamisele. Need kaks teadlast defineerivad töötajate jõustamist kui „teenuse täideviimise lähenemist“ mis hõlmab endas mitmeid juhtkonna toiminguid toetudes neljale ettevõtte „koostisosale“: informatsioon ettevõtte soorituse kohta, preemiad vastavalt ettevõtte sooritusele, teadmised, mis võimaldavad töötajal mõista ning kaasa rääkida ettevõtte sooritusele ning volitused, mis võimaldavad mõjutada ettevõtte suunda ning tulemusi (1992, 32).

Kui rakendada kõik need neli komponenti töösse, siis võib eeldada, et ka töötaja motivatsioon tõuseb just tänu sellele, et ta saab võimaluse areneda, kaasa rääkida tähtsate otsuste langetamisel ning tunneb, et ta on ettevõttele väärtuslik. Autor tõstaks nendest neljast aspektist esikohale just informatsiooni jagamise organisatsioonis, sest ta seostab seda kõige tihedamalt Laulasmaa spa- ja konverentsihotelli töötajatega. Vastava tööalase informatsiooni omamine tekitab töötajas kindlustunde, et tema poolt pakutud lahendused on korrektsed ning toovad ettevõttele ka kasu. Sama mõju on ka igasugusel lisainformatsioonil, mis puudutab kogu ettevõtet.

Autor kasutas käesolevas magistritöös kahte meetodit informatsiooni kogumiseks – juhtumiuuringut ning kvantitatiivset kirjaliku küsimustiku. Põhimeetodiks käesolevas töös on juhtumiuuring, mis kirjeldab detailselt hotelli vastuvõtutöötajate olukorda enne jõustamise strateegia kasutuselevõtmist, strateegia rakendamist ning jõustamise meetodi mõju vastuvõtutöötajatele. Autor viis läbi juhtumiuuringu pikema perioodi vältel alustades käesoleva aasta jaanuarist kuni aprilli keskpaigani. Koostatud küsimustik oli mõeldud kui lisainformatsioon ning andis ülevaate millest töötajad kõige enam puudust tunnevad ning mis on nende kõige valusamad probleemid. Küsitluses osales kaheksa vastuvõtu töötajat ning küsimustiku täitmise ajaperiood oli kaks nädalat alates küsimustiku esitamisest veebikeskkonnas.

Autori vaaluse tulemusena selgus, et kõige suurem probleem hotelli vastuvõtu töötajate hulgas on ebakindlus ning usalduse puudumine. Kuna töötajatel puudusid kindlad juhendid ning reeglid kuidas teatud olukordades toimida, siis käituti enamus situatsioonides oma äranägemise järgi. Tihtipeale ei olnud see parimaks lahenduseks

ning viis konfliktini kas kliendi ja vastuvõtutöötaja vahel või vastuvõtutöötaja ja mõne muu osakonna töötaja vahel. Puudus usaldus nii vastuvõtutöötajatel osakonna juhtide suhtes kui ka vastupidi. Info vähese liikumise tõttu valitses hotelli vastuvõtus ebakindlus, usalduse puudumine ja seega surnud ring.

Autor otsustas esmalt paika seada juhised vastuvõtutöötajate tööülesannete kohta, üldreeglite kohta ning probleemsete olukordade lahendamise kohta. Vastukaja juhendile oli jahe ja pigem vastumeelne, mis on ka mõneti mõistetav. Hotelli vastuvõtt oli kahe ja poole aasta jooksul välja töötanud oma meetodid olukordade lahendamiseks ning uus juhend tundus neile pigem pealesurutud raamidena. Peale põhjaliku seletust juhendi vajalikkusest vähenes ka töötajate vastupanu. Väljatöötatud juhend vähendas vigade hulka kahe kuu jooksul märgatavalt ja parandas töötajate tulemusi tekitades töötajates vähem pingeid ning stressi.

Järgmise väljakutsena otsustas vastuvõtujuht kasutusele võtta töötaja jõustamise meetodi. Esmapilgult tundus autorile, et kõige mõistlikum on kasutada meeskondliku jõustamise meetodit, kuid siiki oli ta sunnitud kiirelt ümber otsustama. Hotelli vastuvõtu eripära on tema väga liikuv ja pidevalt vahetuv kollektiiv. Kuna jõustamise üks tähtsaim komponent on usaldus, siis ei näinud autor mõtet rakendada sama teooriat töötaja peal, kes on alles tööle võetud ning töötajal on alles sisseelamise periood. Autor otsustas kasutusele võtta psühholoogilise jõustamise meetodi ning kasutada seda töötajate peal, kes olid ettevõttes töötanud juba aastaid sealjuures kaotanud oma motivatsiooni rutiini tekkimise tõttu. Nähes, et ebakindlus on suur probleem, otsustas autor innustada töötajaid võtma vastu iseseisvaid otsused ning välja pakkuma innovaatilisi ideid erinevate olukordade lahendamiseks.

Kõige paremini oli ebakindlus tuntav nädalavahetustel, kus hotelli vastuvõtt oli tööl ilma juhtkonna ja müügiosakonna toetuseta. Autor tööb näite, kus esimestel nädalavahetustel helistati talle erinevate küsimustega tunnis kaks – kolm korda. Ka selliste küsimustega millele töötajad vastust teadsid, kuid ei julgenud iseseisvalt otsust teha. Jõustamise strateegia elluviimisel otsustas vastuvõtujuht vastata töötaja küsimustele omakorda küsimusega „Kuidas sina seda olukorda lahendaksid? Mis lahenduse sina pakud?“ motiveerides sellega töötajat ennast mõtlema erinevatele lahenduskäikudele.

Enesekindluse kasvamist oli märgata kolm nädalat peale jõustamise elluviimist ning esimene telefonikõnedest vaba nädalavahetus oli poolteist kuud peale jõustamist. Autor märkas, et töötajad lahendavad innukalt probleeme, ei karda enam lahendusi pakkuda ja teevad oma tööd heatujuliselt. Siinkohal soovib autor juhtida tähelepanu faktile, et töötaja jõustamine on pikemaajaline protsess ning täit efekti ei ole autor siia maani märganud. Seda põhjusel, et peale jõustamise elluviimist ilmnemiseid teatavad probleemid, millest autor kirjutas ka esimeses peatükis jõustamise riskifaktorite teema näol. Teatud hetkel said töötajad niivõrd suure hulga innustust, et hakkasid vastu võtma otsuseid, mis ei olnud enam nende otsustada. Autor nendib, et siinkohal oli see vastuvõtjuhi poolik töö kus juurde antud võimu piirid ei olnud selgelt määratletud ning käesolev jõustamise teema vajab veelkord üle seletamist.

Kokkuvõtlikult võib öelda, et töötaja jõustamise strateegia on tõesti üks alternatiividest rahalise motivaatori kõrval. Kuigi lõplik tulemus on autoril veel saavutamata võib ta töös välja toodud uuringu põhjal väita, et töötaja jõustamise strateegia mõjub positiivselt nii töötajatele kui ka juhtkonnale ning tervele organisatsioonile, mis vastab ka töös esitatud hüpoteesile „millist mõju avaldab töötaja jõustamise meetod Laulasmaa spa- ja konverentsihotelli töötajatele“. Samas tuleb silmas pidada seda, et võimu jagamise ning võimu käest andmise vahel on õhkõrn piir ning jõustamist läbiviiv juht peab olema antud teemas pädev. Autor soovib juhtida tähelepanu ka sellele, et ainuüksi hotelli vastuvõtu personali jõustamisest ei ole ettevõttele niivõrd suurt mõju, et välja tuua otsest positiivset tõusu kogu ettevõtte töötajaskonna hulgas. Autor soovib ka ülejäänud osakonnajuhtidel kasutusele võtta töötaja jõustamise meetod, et parandada töö kvaliteeti, suhtlust erinevate osakondade vahel ning tõsta austust üksteise tehtud töö vastu. Protsess on pikaajaline, kuid autor on kindel, et strateegia rakendamisel on selle kasutegur ettevõttele oluliselt suurem kui rahaline motivaator.

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